

Celebrating Navy Women: Perseverance & Achievements



Women have profoundly impacted our Navy for more than a century, since being allowed to join in 1917.

To honor those pioneers who have led the way, along with the more than 60,000 women who serve today, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday and Mrs. Linda Gilday, in coordination with Navy History and Heritage Command, created a display in CNO's residence, Tingey House, as well as this e-book, which is organized into the following groupings: WWII era and prior; a selection of women 'firsts' in the Navy; and some photos of today's Sailors.

Where additional information is available, the photos are hyperlinked to articles, videos, and oral histories (click the photo to access the files).

While we know this is a small representation of the women who serve today and the millions who have served, it is our hope it sparks conversation that honors women who wear the cloth of this nation. As a Navy, we celebrate the many accomplishments that women have achieved through hard work, grit and determination.



Chief Yeoman (F) Loretta Perfectus Walsh

After enlisting on March 17, 1917, Chief Walsh became not only the woman to serve in the Navy and its first female Chief Petty Officer, but also the first woman to serve in a non-nursing capacity in any branch of the armed forces. She served as a Yeoman (F) in the U.S. Naval Reserve during WWI.



The first enlisted women in the Navy. Recruited to serve for the duration of WWI in order to free up male personnel for duty at sea, nearly 11,000 women were in uniform by Armistice Day (November 11, 1918). Although they were subsequently discharged following the war's end, they had nonetheless demonstrated that women were more than capable of serving in the Navy, paving the way for the establishment of the WAVES in WWII and the integration of women into the regular Navy in 1948.



Capt. Sue S. Dauser

The fifth Superintendent of Navy Nurse Corps (1939-1945), Capt. Dauser became the first female Captain in the U.S. Navy's history in December 1942. It was her steady hand that guided the Navy Nurse Corps through WWII.



Ens. Kathleen Lux, USNR (W)

After entering the U.S. Naval Reserve on November 28, 1942, Ens. Lux became the first female officer in the Civil Engineer Corps.



Cmdr. Mary Sears

Comissioned in the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) in 1943, Cmdr. Sears served as the head of the Navy Hydrographic Office's new Oceanographic Unit where her research proved critical to the survivability of submarines. Following the war she was appointed the first officer-in-charge of the newly established Divison of Oceanography. She transferred to the reserves in 1947, and retired as a commander in 1963. She was a member of nine scientific and honorary societies and was a longtime member of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Instutition (WHOI).



Lt. Susan Ahn Cuddy

In 1942, Lt. Cuddy became the first female Asian-American to serve in the Navy and also its first female gunnery officer. During WWII, she served as an instructor in both combat air tactics and the use of the .50 caliber machine gun. She subsequently worked at U.S. Naval Intelligence as a code breaker and at the National Security Agency during the Cold War. Pictured here with her brothers, who also served in the military.



Capt. Mildred McAfee

The first Director of the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) (1942-1945), Capt. McAfee was also the first female commissioned officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve.



Chief Yeoman Edna Young

Among the first female enlisted to be sworn into the regular Navy on July 7, 1948, Chief Edna Young was both the first African-American enlisted woman in the regular Navy and its first female African-American Chief Petty Officer.



**Lt. j.g. Harriet Ida Pickens (left) and
Ens. Frances Wills**

On December 22, 1944, Lt. j.g. Pickens and Ens. Wills became the first African-American women to be commissioned as officers in the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES).



The Twelve Anchors

Navy nurses who were captured by the Japanese at the fall of Manila in 1942. Initially serving in the infirmary at a prison camp in Santo Tomas, they voluntarily transferred to the prison camp at Los Baños, despite its notoriously poor conditions. They were liberated from captivity in February 1945.



The WAVES played a critical role in naval aviation during WWII, serving as machinists, metalsmiths, and, as pictured here, instructors.



**Hospital Apprentices 2nd Class Ruth C. Isaacs,
Katherine Horton, and Inez Patterson**

On March 2, 1945, these pioneering women became the first African-American Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) to enter Hospital Corps School at the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Md.



Capt. Joy Bright Hancock

Pictured here at center, Capt. Hancock served as a Yeoman (F) during WWI, worked at the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics during the interwar period, and was commissioned as an officer in the WAVES during WWII. As Director of the WAVES, she was instrumental in crafting and securing passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948, which allowed women to serve as permanent, regular members of the U.S. armed forces. She subsequently became one of the first female officers sworn into the regular Navy on October 15, 1948.



Master Chief Yeoman Anna Der-Vartanian

The Navy's first female Master Chief Petty Officer. In 1959, Master Chief Der-Vartanian became the first woman in the U.S. Armed Forces to be promoted to an E-9 rank.



Cmdr. Elizabeth Barrett

The highest ranking female naval officer in Vietnam and the first to hold command in a combat zone. From January 1972 to March 1973, Cmdr. Barrett served at Saigon as the Commanding Officer, Enlisted Personnel for the U.S. Naval Advisory Group, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.



Rear Adm. Fran McKee

Among the first women selected to attend the Naval War College in 1969, Rear Adm. McKee subsequently became the first woman line officer to attain flag rank on June 1, 1976.



Rev. Dianna Pohlman Bell

Upon joining the Navy in 1973, Rev. Bell became the Department of Defense's first female military chaplain. She served from 1973 to 1976.



Lt. j.g. Barbara Allen, Ens. Jane M. Skiles, Lt. j.g. Judith A. Neuffer, and Ens. Kathleen L. McNary

The first women assigned to flight instruction at Naval Air Station Pensacola in March 1973. Lt. j.g. Allen subsequently became the first woman to receive her Wings of Gold.



Lt. j.g. Barbara Allen Rainey

Upon earning her wings on February 22, 1974, Lt. j.g. Rainey became the first qualified female naval aviator. She subsequently became the first female naval aviator to qualify as a jet pilot. Tragically, she died in the line of duty July 13, 1982 while serving our nation as a flight instructor for VT-3 at Naval Air Station Whiting Field.



Rear Adm. Grace Murray Hopper

A computer science pioneer, Rear Adm. Hopper oversaw the development of the first compiler and the first programming language to use word commands in the 1950s. Recalled to active duty multiple times after she reached the mandatory retirement age in 1966, she retired as a Rear Admiral at the age of 79, making her one of the oldest active-duty officers to ever serve.



Lt. j.g. Judith Neuffer

One of the first six women to qualify as a naval aviator and, as of 2020, a civilian manager at NASA. After earning her Wings of Gold and later in her career, then-Capt. Neuffer joined VW-4 ("The Hurricane Hunters") and became the first female naval aviator to fly through the eye of a hurricane.



Capt. Rosemary Mariner

Capt. Mariner was not only among the first female aviators to earn her wings in 1974, but also one of the first female Navy jet pilots, flying both the Douglas A-4C Skyhawk and the LTV A7E Corsair II. She also held the distinction of being the first woman to command an operational squadron, leading VAQ-34 during Operation Desert Storm.



Hull Technician 3rd Class (DV) Donna Tobias

Hull Technician (DV) Tobias became the first female diver in 1975. She asked her recruiter about becoming a diver when she enlisted in the Navy in March 1974, and was told “no way, women can’t get in.” Undeterred, she chose hull technician as her rating because she liked the physical labor and knew it would teach her a useful skill. While she worked as a shipfitter, Tobias undertook the lengthy process of acquiring a dive school waiver that would allow her to circumvent the gender restriction then in place. She served for eight years.



Command Master Chief Beth Lambert

In 1979, Command Master Chief Lambert became the first woman to be designated an Aviation Structural Mechanic (Structures). She went on to become the first woman to be selected as the U.S. Navy Shore Sailor of the Year in 1988, among the first women to be stationed on board an aircraft carrier (USS Dwight D. Eisenhower [CVN-69]) in 1994 and, ultimately, the first female Command Master Chief of an aircraft carrier when she was selected to serve on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) in 2003.



U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1980

The first 55 women to ever graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy. Since 1980, more than 4,600 women have graduated from the Naval Academy and have gone on to excel in their military careers and beyond.



Lt. Cmdr. Brenda “Raven” Robinson

The first African-American female naval aviator, Lt. Cmdr. Robinson earned her Wings of Gold on June 6, 1980. In 1978, Robinson was one of 10 women in the nation chosen to go into the Navy's flight program, one of three to graduate from her class and the 42nd to graduate in U.S. history. In 2002, Brenda retired from the Naval Reserves as a Lieutenant Commander.



Cmdr. Darlene Iskra

Upon assuming command of USS Opportune (ARS-41) on December 27, 1990, Cmdr. Iskra became the first female commanding officer of a U.S. Navy ship. She served in the U.S. Navy for 21 years.



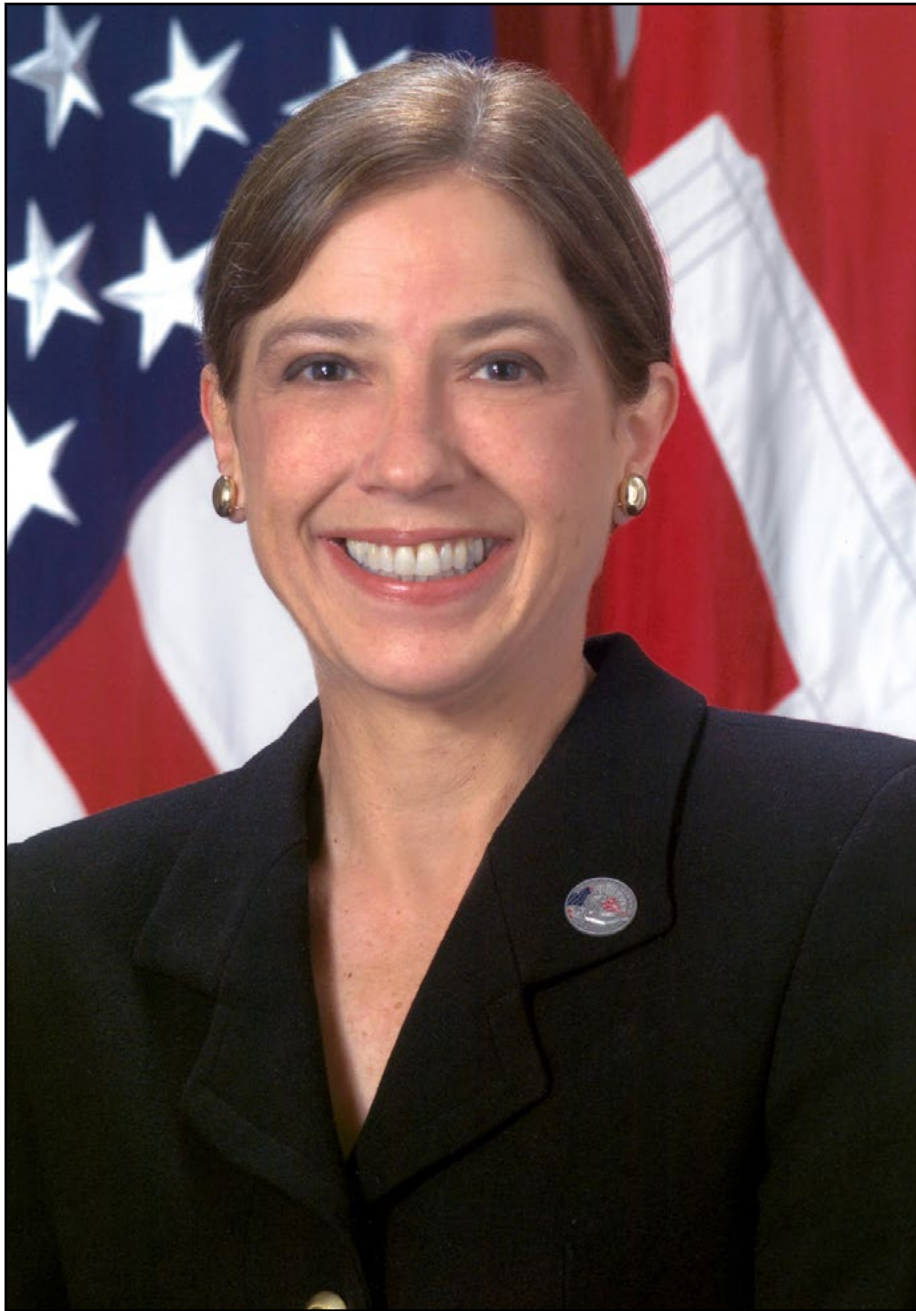
Capt. Wendy Lawrence

A Navy helicopter pilot with 11 years of service, and NASA astronaut, Capt. Lawrence became the first female U.S. Naval Academy graduate to go into space in 1995.



Rear Adm. Deborah A. Loewer

Among the first women officers to be selected for shipboard duty, Rear Adm. Loewer attended the Surface Warfare Basic Course in 1979, graduating first in her class. She went on to become the first warfare qualified woman to attain flag rank in 2003, and served as Director of the White House Situation Room during the events of September 11, 2001, and the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Susan Morrissey Livingstone

Having served as Acting Secretary of the Navy from January to February 2003, Secretary Livingstone is the first woman to hold this position.



Fleet Master Chief (AW/SW) April D. Beldo

A woman of many firsts, Fleet Master Chief Beldo became the first female Command Master Chief (CMC) of Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Ill. in 2006, the first African-American female CMC to be assigned to an aircraft carrier (USS Carl Vinson [CVN-70]) in 2009, the first female and first African-American Force Master Chief (FORCM) for Naval Education and Training Command in 2012, and the first female Manpower, Personnel, Training, and Education (MPT&E) Fleet Master Chief (FLTCM), in 2017.



Lt. j.g. Amber Cowan (right)
Lt. j.g. Jennifer Noonan (center)

Lt. j.g. Amber Cowan and Lt. j.g. Jennifer Noonan (USS Maine [SSBN-741], Blue Crew) received their gold dolphin pins on December 5, 2012. They, along with Lt. j.g. Marquette Leveque (USS Wyoming [SSBN-742], Gold Crew) were the first female unrestricted line officers to qualify as submarine warfare officers.



Chief Culinary Specialist Dominique Saavedra

The first enlisted woman to become a fully-qualified submariner, Chief Culinary Specialist Saavedra earned her qualifications while embarked aboard USS Ohio (SSGN-726) and received her silver dolphin pin August 2, 2016, just prior to deploying aboard USS Michigan (SSGN-727).



Steffanie Easter

Served as Director, Navy Staff Office of the Chief of Naval Operations from January 2018 to December 2019. Mrs. Easter was the first civilian to hold that position, after a career with more than three decades of federal service experience in the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army.



Kathryn Murphy

The senior scientific technical manager for software engineering at the Naval Warfare Information Center (NIWC) Atlantic, Ms. Murphy was named the 2019 Women in Defense (WID) Palmetto Chapter's "Female Executive of the Year."



Rear Adm. Katherine L. Gregory

The first woman to serve as the XO and CO of an active duty Seabee battalion, Rear Adm. Gregory subsequently became the Civil Engineer Corps' (CEC) first female flag officer in 2009 and the first female Chief of the CEC, where she served from 2012-2015.



Adm. Michelle Howard

The first woman promoted to the rank of four-star admiral and the first African-American woman to command a U.S. Navy ship (USS Rushmore [LSD-47]), Adm. Howard served as Vice Chief of Naval Operations from 2014 to 2016 and Commander of both

United States Naval Forces Europe – Naval Forces Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command Naples (NATO) from 2016 to 2017.



Dr. Kathy Sullivan

A retired member of the U.S. Naval Reserve, Capt. Sullivan holds the distinctions of being both the first woman to walk in space (1984) and the first to dive to Challenger Deep in the Marianas Trench, the deepest point in the world's oceans (2020).



Lt. j.g. Madeline Swegle

Upon earning her Wings of Gold on July 31, 2020, Lt. j.g. Swegle became the Navy's first-known Black female tactical air pilot.



Lt. Cmdr. Ashley Carline

Lt. Cmdr. Ashley Carline served as the Chief of Naval Operation's Flag Aide for two years from September 2018 – October 2020. She is the first Black female to serve as Aide-de-Camp for two different Chiefs of Naval Operation.



Rear Adm. Yvette Davids (left)
Capt. Shanti Sethi
Cmdr. Teresa Elders

All three women served on USS Higgins (DDG 76) under then-Commanding Officer Cmdr. Mike Gilday. Davids served as Executive Officer, Sethi as Combat Systems Officer, and Elders as Operations officer.



Command Master Chief Dee Allen

Prior to retirement, Command Master Chief Allen was one of the most senior enlisted women in the Navy. She served as Command Master Chief of U.S. Fleet Cyber Command/U.S. 10th Fleet (FCC/C10F).



Members of NAS Oceana squadrons conducted the first all-female “Missing Man Formation” during a flyover on February 2, 2019 to honor the life and memory of naval aviation pioneer, Capt. Rosemary Mariner. Pictured in the back row (left to right) are [Lt. Christy Talisse](#), [Lt. Emily Rixey](#), [Lt. Cmdr. Jennifer Hesling](#), [Lt. Kelly Harris](#), [Lt. Amanda Lee](#). Sitting in the front row are Lt. Cmdr. Danielle Thiriot, [Cmdr. Stacy Uttecht](#), [Cmdr. Leslie Mintz](#), and [Lt. Cmdr. Paige Blok](#).



Ens. Christa Robison

A student naval aviator assigned to Training Air Wing 4, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Ens. Robison stands in front of a Beechcraft T-6B Texan II aircraft March 4, 2020.



Naval Mobile Construction Battalion FOUR

Assigned in late 2011 to Helmand Province, Afghanistan, this was the first all-female Seabee construction team. They built an operations center, gym, and two B-huts a week ahead of schedule.



Aviation Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Annie Adams
Lieutenant Junior Grade Sarah Black
Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class Aerial Lucky
Aviation Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Dayna Williams

Assigned to the "Ghostriders" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 28, this group of women conducted MH-60S Seahawk operations aboard the Blue Ridge-class command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC-20) during a successful deployment.



Machinist Mate 2nd Class Logan English

Machinist Mate 2nd Class Logan English assigned to the USS Harpers Ferry (LSD-49), rests after combatting a fire onboard USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) on July 14, 2020. She, along with Sailors from multiple commands and the Federal San Diego Firefighters, engaged in a four-day firefighting effort to extinguish the fire.



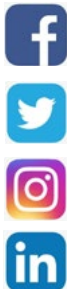
Aviation Ordnanceman 3rd Class Jennifer Sheneman

Assigned to the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN-77), AO3 Sheneman is seen here parading the colors at an Old Dominion University women's soccer game in Norfolk, Va., as part of Fleet Week Hampton Roads.

Tingey House Display






We want to hear from you as well. If you know a woman who is making a difference in the Navy, send your recommendations to the U.S. Navy CNO social media platforms (linked below). This is a small space, but there's room to grow!



Navy Women in Ships
A Deployment To Equality
1942-1982

by James L. Lewis, TCM, USN



Let's continue to write the story of Navy Women. Tag **#NavyWomenMakingHistory** with your own stories of service.